

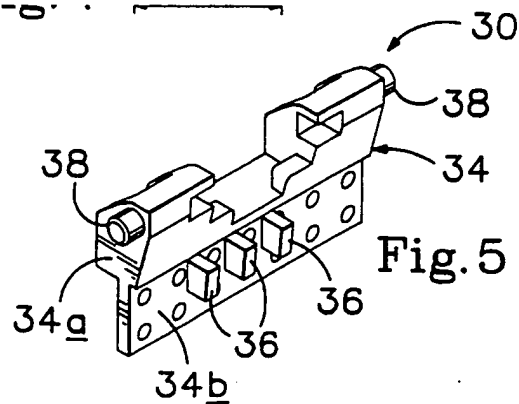
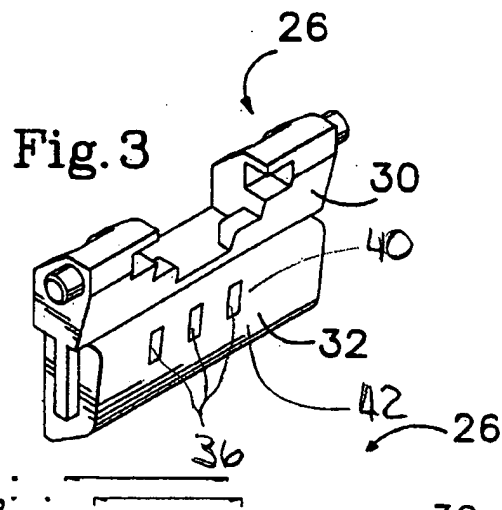
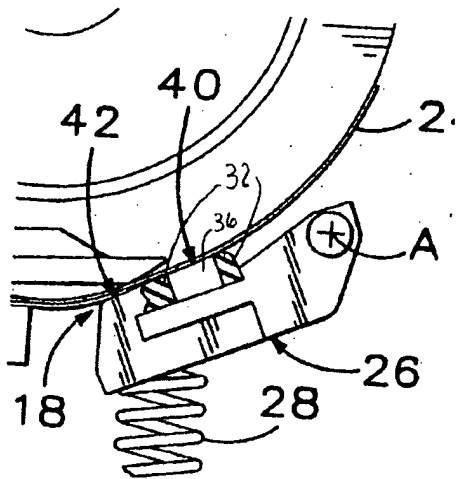
added to the reproduction of Olson Fig. 3. Key passages from the text in Olson are underlined.

Olson column 3, line 61 through column 4, line 15 reads as follows.

The height of the upstanding portions is generally constant, corresponding to the thickness of the separator's pad when initially formed (see FIG. 2). Although the thickness of the pad decreases due to wear, the thickness of the upstanding portions remains relatively constant.

In the depicted embodiment, pad 32 substantially surrounds the upstanding portions, extending forwardly therefrom a distance approximately twice the length of the upstanding portions. The pad is formed from a frictionally adherent material such as rubber, and is effective in selectively opposing passage of paper thereacross. As best shown in FIGS. 2 and 3, the forward most portion of the pad angles somewhat downwardly as it extends from the upstanding members. The edges of the pad are rounded to better accommodate sheet passage thereover.

Referring once again to FIG. 2, and considering with particularity the effect of employing the just-described separator, the reader will understand that such separator is configured so as to oppose input of second sheet 24b until after the top sheet 24a is taken completely into the printer. This is accomplished without unduly opposing input of top sheet 24a. Such effect is due to the varying frictional forces applied by the separator in different regions thereof. The top sheet engages the separator in a first surface region 40, such region being characterized by the application of a relatively low first frictional force against the sheet passing thereacross. This paper-to-pad frictional force, it will be understood, is less than the corresponding frictional force between the rollers and the first sheet. This relatively low frictional force is at least partially due to the positioning of the upstanding portions, such portions offering a relatively low frictional force in opposition to sheet passage as described above. In contrast, the second sheet engages the separator in a second surface region 42. Region 42 is characterized by a higher second frictional force applied to the second sheet. The second region is preferably defined entirely by pad 32. The pad, as described above, is formed from a frictionally adherent material so as to oppose sheet passage thereacross. This paper-to-pad frictional force for the second sheet is thus greater than the paper-to-paper frictional forces between the first and second sheets and the papers are separated as they enter the input port.



The lower friction of region 40 in Olson is achieved by combining upstanding portions 36 and pad 32. The higher friction region 42 in Olson is achieved by omitting upstanding portions 36 – region 42 is all pad 32. The Examiner's apparent assertion in the final Action that the mere presence of lower and higher friction regions in Olson somehow necessarily implies supports oriented as in Claim 12 is plainly not correct.

Also, the Examiner does not explain which part in Olson is the claimed span of flexible material and which parts are the claimed plurality of supports. Apparently the Examiner is asserting that resilient pad 32 in Olson is a span of flexible material and that rigid body 30 is a plurality of supports supporting the span. Any such assertion is not correct.

Body 30 in Olson is a single part. "The body [30] is formed from a rigid, wear-resistant material such as nylon, and is generally molded as a unitary piece." Olson column 3, lines 9-11. See also Olson Fig. 5. Upstanding portions 36 on body 30 do not support pad 32. Rather, upstanding portions 36 extend through pad 32. "[P]ad 32 substantially surrounds the upstanding portions...." Olson column 3, lines 44-45. See also Olson Figs. 2 and 3. Thus, body 30 in Olson is not a plurality of supports as claimed.

Resilient pad 32 in Olson is not a span of flexible material. Pad 30 does not span anything, at least not in the context of Claim 12. During patent examination, the pending claims must be "given their broadest reasonable interpretation consistent with the specification." MPEP 2111. The dictionary definition of a span is "2: an extent, stretch, reach, or spread between two limits: as **a**: a limited space (as of time) ; *especially* : an individual's lifetime **b**: the spread or extent between abutments or supports (as of a bridge) ; *also* : a portion thus supported." Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. The Specification contains numerous examples that a span means the spread or extent of material between supports. See, for example, the embodiments shown in Figs. 16-23 in which a pliable sheet 94 extends between ridges/supports 116 in Figs. 16-23, Specification paragraphs 0028 and 0030. There is no such span in Olson.

In summary, Olson does not teach the following limitations in Claim 12:

1. supports oriented relative to one another such that the degree of resistance varies along the length of the separator;

2. a span of flexible material; and/or
3. a plurality of supports supporting the span.

The rejection of Claim 12 should be withdrawn.

Examining The Withdrawn Claims

Claim 12 is "generic" to the "species" of Claims 18 and 20. (Generic and species is set off in quotation marks to indicate the Examiner's designation of species -- the Applicants traversed this designation as inappropriate in an earlier Response.) The sheet media input structure of the "species" of Claim 12 is used in the printer of the "species" of Claim 20. The sheet media input structure of the "species" of Claim 18 necessarily meets the limitations of amended Claim 12. Therefore, Claims 18 and 20 and their respective dependent claims may be properly examined even if it is assumed the restriction was appropriate.

Again, within the context of the "species" based restriction, Claim 12 may be considered generic to Claims 1, 7, 10 and 11 in the sense that the structure of Claims 1, 7, 10 and 11 could be used in the sheet media input structure of Claim 12. Therefore, Claims 1, 7, 10 and 11 and their respective dependent claims may be properly examined even if it is assumed the restriction was appropriate.

The foregoing is believed to be a complete response to the pending Action.

Respectfully submitted,

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